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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 98: Permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources (A/55/84-E/2000/16)

1. **Mr. El-Beblawi** (Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia), introducing the report prepared by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) contained in document A/55/84-E/2000/16, said that like the previous reports submitted since 1967, it documented the negative impact of the Israeli occupation on the Palestinian people, their land, natural resources and environment. The report, based primarily on articles from the Israeli and Palestinian press, indicated that the geographic distribution of settlements on the occupied Palestinian territories severely restricted the growth of Palestinian communities (A/55/84-E/2000/16, para. 7).

2. The settler population of the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) had nearly doubled since 1994 and settlements had continued to expand during the first months of the Barak administration. By the end of February 2000, a sufficient number of new housing units had been constructed to accommodate 30,000 more settlers, thousands of other units had been approved and Israel had appropriated more than 5,845 acres of mostly Palestinian-owned land, which constituted one third of East Jerusalem. The continuing Israeli occupation was depleting the drinking water supply of the Palestinians. Waste water, particularly industrial waste, dumped by Israeli settlements into Palestinian lands was contaminating their water and, according to a study by Bethlehem University, endangering the residents' health. The tension and uncertainty sown by the occupation had inhibited investment and growth, aggravated by Israeli-imposed restrictions on the movement of goods and persons between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza, and between the West Bank and Jerusalem.

3. The settler population in the occupied Syrian Golan had increased by 18 per cent since 1994 and was continuing to grow. The Israeli authorities planned to allocate 1,157 dunams to seven settlements. Employment opportunities for the Arab population of the occupied Syrian Golan were restricted to unskilled and semi-skilled daily wage labour at substantially lower pay and workers were not entitled to social benefits, health insurance or unemployment compensation. Access to educational facilities was also limited. Until enduring peace was realized, all of those issues would continue to be troubling for both the region and the world at large.

4. **Mr. Jilani** (Observer for Palestine) said that there had been a dramatic deterioration of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. In an unprecedented level of aggression, the Israeli occupying forces had used rockets fired from helicopter gunships, tanks and anti-tank missiles and had enforced a total military blockade around Palestinian towns and cities. As at 16 October, the continuing Israeli aggression had resulted in the deaths of 87 Palestinians and the wounding of more than 3,000 people, in addition to destroying property and livelihoods. Although it had always been argued by two delegations that discussion of the sovereignty of the Palestinian people over their natural resources was not relevant to the Committee's work and that the sponsors of draft resolutions on that agenda item were attempting to politicize the Committee's deliberations, it was now apparent that the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, and in the Middle East affected not only international peace and security but also economic and social stability at the global level, as evidenced by the instability of world markets.

5. The illegal Israeli settlement policies, based on the confiscation of Palestinian land and the exploitation of Palestinian water and other natural resources, not only undermined the peace process but were also responsible for the past two weeks of hostilities. Settlements in the heart of Palestinian towns and cities, such as Netzarim in Gaza City, where a few families occasionally resided to the detriment of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who lived in Gaza City, had been used as military barracks to terrorize the Palestinian populations. The excessive use of force by Israel, including heavy weapons, gunships, tanks, rockets and anti-tank missiles (as if the Palestinian side had any tanks) demonstrated the arrogance of power and the Israeli leadership's continuing mentality of military occupation. Worse still, the Israeli side attempted to shift the blame by claiming that the Palestinian leadership was instigating the violence and

that the Palestinians were sending their children into the streets to die in a public relations exercise. The Israeli side must understand that Palestinians loved their children too, and that peace would prevail only when Palestinian lives were considered equal to and as dear as Jewish lives.

6. In the past three decades, Israel, the occupying Power, had defied the international community and violated every principle of international law that applied to the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. It had stubbornly pursued a policy of Judaization of the Holy City of Jerusalem by attempting to alter its legal status, religious and cultural character and demographic composition. According to the report, illegal settlements under the current Israeli Government had outpaced even those established under the Netanyahu Government. International law, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the terms of reference of the Middle East peace process and the signed agreements called for an end to the Israeli occupation and for the realization of the right of the Palestinian people to freely determine its future, and the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and property or to compensation if they chose not to return. The fulfilment of those principles was essential for a just and lasting peace in the region.

7. The Palestinian people had accepted the historic compromise whereby Palestine would be divided into two States and had agreed, moreover, that the Palestinian State should be established on the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel in 1967, which comprised only 22 per cent of historic Palestine. According to General Assembly resolution 181 (II) by which Palestine was to be partitioned, the Jewish State was to occupy approximately 54 per cent of the land; however, Israel proper currently comprised 78 per cent of Palestine. In conclusion, Palestine remained committed to the peace process and to the implementation of all signed agreements and believed that a prerequisite for a just and lasting peace would be Israel's withdrawal from all the Palestinian territory it had occupied in 1967, including Jerusalem, and its recognition of the right of return of the Palestinian refugees. Israel must also withdraw completely from the occupied Syrian Golan.

8. **Mr. Al-Hameli** (United Arab Emirates) said that the report was particularly relevant in the light of the deteriorating living conditions endured by that people as a result of the ongoing criminal acts committed by the Israeli occupying forces against the Palestinian people and its legitimate rights.

9. Despite all the political and diplomatic endeavours that had been exerted, in the past few weeks the occupying Israeli military forces had increased their attacks and violations, killing more than 100 people and severely injuring thousands. The Israeli Government continued to pursue its policy of destroying mosques and important Islamic and Arab cultural sites and centres in all parts of occupied Palestine, demolishing houses, expropriating natural resources, water and agricultural land, disregarding the rights of the Palestinian population, revoking residency rights and driving that population out of their homes, to be replaced by thousands of Jewish immigrants from all parts of the world.

10. Periodic reports on the agenda item under discussion had clearly shown the steady rise under successive Israeli Governments in illegal settlement activity throughout the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including Jerusalem and the Syrian Arab Golan. However, Israeli violations were not restricted to settlement, but included the theft and exploitation of all water resources in the occupied territories. Israel denied the indigenous population access to those resources and demolished water-harvesting storage pools and tanks. It also imposed harsh restrictions that prevented the population living under occupation from farming and benefiting from its agricultural land, and destroyed mature, productive trees. The Israeli authorities were responsible for environmental degradation, allowing industrial waste and untreated wastewater to be dumped by settlements into Palestinian lands, with a deleterious effect on public health.

11. His delegation held the Israeli Government entirely responsible for the outcome of the current situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. It condemned the air and sea attacks carried out by Israeli forces on Palestinian Authority buildings inside the occupied Palestinian territories and on economic and development institutions, houses and holy places; the blockade of Palestinian towns and villages, and the embargo placed by the Israeli Government on the movement of Palestinian aircraft and operation of Gaza port. All those actions were detrimental to the human, social and economic development of the entire Palestinian people.

12. He therefore renewed his country's appeal to the United Nations to assume its historical legal and political responsibilities towards the Palestinian people, and urge Israel to respect that people's land, natural resources and right to movement and work, and to enable it to realize its legitimate goal of establishing an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital, pursuant to the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy and the principle of land for peace.

13. **Mr. Babar** (Pakistan) said that the Palestinian people had long suffered foreign occupation and the denial of its fundamental right to live in peace on its own land and exercise permanent sovereignty over its territory. The recent uprising had once again illustrated that the Palestinian people would not accept any solution short of the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The continuing Israeli occupation had seriously undermined the economic and social development of the Palestinian people, and the geographic distribution of Israeli settlements on the occupied Palestinian territories severely restricted the growth of Palestinian communities (A/55/84-E/2000/16, para. 7). While Palestinian requests for building permits were rejected, Israeli settlements continued to expand with the help of State subsidies. Those settlements harmed the environment by dumping waste water, particularly industrial waste, which contaminated the drinking water and created a health hazard. Moreover, the Israeli authorities demolished many homes, sent Palestinians notices to vacate houses and barracks and detained them for attempting to cultivate their own land (A/55/84-E/2000/16, para. 16). The Israeli occupation and the political uncertainty it created, compounded by the recent surge in violence, also inhibited investment and growth in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

14. There could be no lasting peace in the region until the Palestinian people realized its inalienable rights to establish an independent State with the Holy City of Jerusalem as the capital and to exercise full sovereignty over Haram al-Sharif. Consistent with its policy in respect of all peoples struggling against foreign occupation, Pakistan extended its unequivocal support to the just struggle of the Palestinian people. Partial independence would not suffice; the Palestinian people must enjoy full freedom to realize its right to development. In conclusion, he also deplored the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan, including the unequal distribution of agricultural land, restricted employment opportunities for the Arab population at substantially lower wages and limited access to educational facilities.

15. **Mr. Buallay** (Bahrain) said that Israel's continuing violations in the occupied Arab territories, as exemplified in the distressing tragedies now unfolding there, hindered the establishment of the just and comprehensive peace sought by the Arab States. The Israeli occupation had adverse social and economic repercussions on the inhabitants of the occupied Palestinian territory and the occupied Syrian Golan, particularly since their natural resources had been depleted as a result of Israel's ongoing settlement of those regions.

16. Local Palestinian communities were denied access to sufficient water as a result of Israel's control of the region's water resources and their growth was also severely affected by the geographical distribution of the settlements. Moreover, the health and educational facilities available to Palestinians were severely affected by the security restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation; the environment was badly polluted by industrial and chemical waste from industries established in the occupied Arab territories; and the Palestinian workforce, as well as trade, had been affected by the border closures imposed by Israel for security purposes.

17. Now that the new millennium had dawned, he looked forward to settlement of the 50-year-old Middle East conflict, the establishment of a lasting, just and comprehensive peace and Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories. He also looked forward to guarantee of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and to the establishment of their own independent State on their own soil with Jerusalem as its capital.

18. **Mr. Al-Hadid** (Jordan) said that it was clear from the report that the policy of successive Israeli Governments in building new and expanding existing settlements was intended to impose the status quo and alter the demographic composition of the occupied Palestinian territories, in defiance of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and of the whole international community.

19. Security Council resolution 446 (1979) stated that the policy and practices of Israel in establishing settlements in the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967 had no legal validity and

constituted a serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, and Security Council resolution 465 (1980) called upon Israel to halt settlement activity and dismantle the existing settlements. The General Assembly had adopted numerous resolutions concerning the negative social and economic effects of the Israeli settlements on the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territories and the Syrian Arab inhabitants of the occupied Syrian Golan.

20. Such effects included severe restrictions imposed on the growth of local Palestinian communities, which were either surrounded by settlements or had had large amounts of land expropriated from them in order to permit the establishment or expansion of settlements. Since Palestinian access to agricultural land was severely restricted, the agricultural sector could make only a limited contribution to the gross domestic product. Further effects were the continual conflicts between settlers and Palestinians, which proved an endless source of provocation, strife and instability; the inequitable distribution of water resources, and Israel's disproportionate exploitation of groundwater, which threatened to exhaust that resource. While Israel consumed 80 per cent of all water used in the West Bank, the restrictions it imposed on the Palestinian population denied the latter access to even the most basic of its water requirements.

21. Palestinian agricultural land and groundwater was polluted by waste, especially industrial waste, from Israeli settlements. Environmental regulations on soil, air and water quality, and restrictions on industrial development were much less assiduously enforced in the occupied Palestinian territory than in Israel itself. Polluting Israeli industries had been relocated into the occupied territories and solid waste from Israeli industrial zones was routinely dumped in Palestinian areas.

22. With regard to the economy, the continued ambiguity of the legal and political situation inhibited investment and growth. The laws and military orders in force during the occupation remained in place, a situation which was further aggravated by Israeli-imposed restrictions on the movement of goods, factors of production and people between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza, and between the West Bank and Jerusalem. Israel also persisted in obstructing economic and commercial exchanges between the Palestinian economy and neighbouring Arab countries, with a view to ensuring that the former economy remained subservient to and dependent upon its own.

23. In the occupied Syrian Golan, where 17,000 Israeli settlers resided, the living conditions of the Arab inhabitants continued to deteriorate because of the restrictions imposed by Israel on work and education. Employment opportunities were limited to unskilled daily wage labour. Most workers had no access to social benefits or health insurance and substantial wage differences prevailed, to the detriment of the Syrian Arab population.

24. His Government strongly condemned the criminal attacks carried out by the Israeli authorities and Israeli settlers to which the population of holy Jerusalem and the occupied Palestinian territories had been exposed during the recent bloody events, and the destruction of Palestinian national installations and institutions. These events had confirmed the validity of Jordan's warnings against allowing a party that was inimical to peace to impose its policy. If there were any further use of violence, the peace process would be the first casualty.

25. **Mr. Gasmalla** (Sudan) condemned Israel's armed aggression against the Palestinian people following Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and said that the optimism surrounding the peace process begun in Oslo seven years earlier was diminishing by the day as a result of Israel's obduracy and arrogance in refusing to comply with the resolutions of the United Nations. As underlined in the report before the Committee (A/55/84-E/2000/16), the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory had adverse repercussions on the living conditions of the inhabitants of that territory, whose environment and supply of natural resources were both harmed by Israel's control of the region, as were growth and investment. The same applied to the occupied Syrian Golan, where the ongoing settlement expansion restricted the employment opportunities and job security of the Arab population. The expansion of educational facilities was also restricted as a result of the measures taken by the occupying Power.

26. The current killing of defenceless Palestinian civilians in the occupied territories in gross violation of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War was indicative of the present Israeli Government's support for such provocative and open acts of aggression. He therefore called on the United Nations to exert pressure on Israel

to desist from its repressive practices and flagrant human rights violations. The Committee should reaffirm the view that the Israeli settlements in the occupied Arab territories, including Jerusalem, were illegitimate and constituted an obstacle to social and economic development. Equally, it should reaffirm the inalienable right of the Palestinian people and the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan to their natural resources, as well as to all of their economic resources, and regard any violation of that right as illegal.

27. **Mr. Sabbagh** (Syrian Arab Republic) recalled that his delegation had, in the past, warned that Israel's efforts to change the demographic and geographical composition of those territories, particularly in Jerusalem, would close the door on any prospects for peace. Current events, however, showed that the Israeli occupation authorities had decided to take their practices a step further by imposing their will on the Palestinian people, using lethal weapons to do so.

28. The peace which Israel was now attempting to impose on the region could not be further removed from the peace which the international community had been striving to achieve on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace and Israel's full withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories to the line of 4 June 1967. Moreover, in view of the tragic situation which now prevailed, any discussion of Israeli occupation policies was pointless, not only because the record of those practices — as further updated by the latest report (A/55/84-E/2000/16) — spoke for itself, but because it was meaningless to talk about figures and statistics in the face of the events now taking place in the Palestinian territory.

29. The present confrontations resulted from the clash between Israel's attempts to force the Arab people to yield to its will and the attempts of the Arabs to obtain their rights on the basis of Security Council resolutions and with the support of the international community. Israel's aggressive conduct and excessive use of force over the past two weeks showed that it had no desire to seek peace. Instead, it was endeavouring to provoke the Palestinian people and coerce it into relinquishing occupied Jerusalem, the holy sites and the right of refugees to return home. It had also failed to fulfil its pledge to make a full withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967. Peace in the region would be the victim of such conduct, just as Palestinians were the victims of Israeli aggression.

30. In order to rescue the situation, the international community should take decisive action to ensure the implementation of Security Council resolutions by bringing the principles of international law and international humanitarian law to bear on the aggressor and occupier, which, by virtue of its hostile practices, manifested its contempt for all principles of justice and right on which normal relations between peace-loving States were built.

31. **Mr. Ayari** (Tunisia) said that the disturbing events taking place in the occupied Palestinian territory, in which almost 100 Palestinian civilians had been killed and hundreds more injured, including innocent children, were clear evidence of the extent to which the situation had deteriorated. The provocative and arbitrary acts of the Israeli security forces plainly violated the Geneva Conventions guaranteeing the fundamental human rights of Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory. As indicated in the report prepared by ESCWA (A/55/84-S/2000/16), the delay in implementing the agreements concluded between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, combined with Israeli practices such as settlement expansion and road closures, exacerbated the poor living conditions of the Palestinian people.

32. His delegation shared the concern of the international community in regard to the continuing Israeli occupation and the inhumane practices directed at the Arab inhabitants of the occupied regions. After citing examples of these from the report, he drew attention to paragraph 57, which detailed some of the employment problems faced by the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan. His delegation supported peaceful efforts to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, and believed that the international community must ensure that Israel ended its illegal practices and complied with the relevant Security Council resolutions. He expressed the hope that the meeting of the Palestinian and Israeli leaders being held in Sharm al-Shaikh under the auspices of the United States of America would calm the present situation with the ultimate aim of advancing the peace process.

33. **Mr. Fahmy** (Egypt) said that the military occupation of territory by armed force constituted the greatest violation of the most basic human rights. The

adverse effects of military occupation on those living in the occupied regions were further aggravated by the systematic policy of settling those regions, uprooting the inhabitants from their land and denying them the use of its natural resources, restricting educational and employment opportunities and impeding development. As detailed in the report before the Committee, the Israeli practices in the occupied Arab territories were a gross violation of United Nations resolutions and of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. They could not be disregarded, particularly in view of the calls for respect for human rights, the ending of occupation and the guarantee of self-determination. He therefore urged all States to avoid applying double standards in dealing with human rights issues and to ensure that their calls were not made exclusively on behalf of peoples and minorities in their own regions.

34. In conclusion, he said that the recent bloody events in the Middle East region proved that the occupation had no future and that a just peace was the basis of all political and economic stability in any inflamed region of the world. He therefore looked forward to the Israeli side's compliance with Security Council resolutions and to an earnest endeavour on its part to cease its imperialist practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan, particularly in regard to the sovereignty of the inhabitants of those occupied territories over their natural resources.

35. **Mr. Al-Haddad** (Yemen) said that the Israelis' excessive use of force against children, women and old persons during the recent events, and the rising death toll, made it imperative for new efforts to be made to confront Israel and promote the peace process. The continued expansion of Israeli settlements was completely unlawful and constituted the core of the current problem. The issue must be dealt with on the basis of human rights.

36. The Sharm al-Sheikh summit was faced with a very serious situation. It would be difficult to break out of the cycle of violence because of Israel's intransigence and refusal to recognize Palestinian human rights. The report (A/55/84-E/2000/16) detailed the deterioration in Palestinian living standards, the expansion of Israeli settlements and the environmental degradation caused by the dumping by the settlements of their wastewater, especially industrial waste, into Palestinian lands.

37. The continued uncertainty about the legal and political situation inhibited investment and growth. The laws and military orders in force during the occupation remained in place, a situation which was further aggravated by Israeli-imposed restrictions on the movement of goods, factors of production and people between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza, and between the West Bank and Jerusalem.

38. Israel's closure of the Palestinian territories, including those areas under Palestinian Authority jurisdiction, which had frequently been blockaded for prolonged periods, was a violation of internationally recognized laws relating to human rights. Further examples of the restrictions imposed on Palestinian economic activities abounded.

39. The course currently being pursued by the Israeli authorities would only exacerbate the tension. The peace process could only be revived through the implementation of Security Council resolutions, recognition of the legitimate human rights of the Palestinian people and the establishment of an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital. Moreover, Israel must withdraw from the occupied Syrian Arab Golan.

40. **Mr. Megiddo** (Israel) lamented the efforts to divert the Committee's attention from such issues as poverty, malnutrition and economic deprivation, which were of paramount importance at the beginning of the third millennium. His delegation could have chosen to respond in detail to each and every aspect of the ESCWA report but would refrain from doing so out of respect for the Committee and its valuable time. It nonetheless wished to point out that the report was one-sided and did not present a genuinely balanced view of the situation.

41. In the decade since the Madrid Peace Conference and the Oslo accords, four consecutive Israeli Governments had strived to achieve peace with their Palestinian neighbours on the assumption that they had found a partner for peace in Chairman Arafat and the Palestinian Authority. At Camp David in July, Prime Minister Barak had indicated his willingness to make painful concessions in order to achieve peace, and the parties had agreed that negotiations would continue free from intimidation and threats of violence. The intense violence of the past two weeks was a violation of that agreement, threatened the peace process and had clearly been initiated by the Palestinian side in order to

create a new and tense reality that would coerce Israel into further concessions and result in political gains for the Palestinians. Those tactics would not succeed. Israel would not yield to violence and would be compelled to defend itself if the Palestinians insisted on advancing their goals through force. Israel would not conduct negotiations until the violence had subsided completely.

42. A major breakthrough had been reached that morning at the Sharm al-Sheikh summit, as both parties had agreed to end the fighting and violence and to take certain steps, the most important being to condemn the violence and restore calm and stability as a basis for continuing the peace process. Israel was determined to bring peace to the Middle East and looked forward to the day when the region would flourish as a result of its cooperation with its neighbours in, inter alia, developing arid and semi-arid zones, carrying out research and development, using science and technology to ensure adequate food supplies and coping with water shortage, soil salinization and accelerated desertification. His delegation sincerely hoped that the Palestinians would once and for all abandon the path of violence and join in regional development efforts.

43. **Mr. Jilani** (Observer for Palestine), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that he wished to respond to the allegations with which Israeli officials continued to bombard the media, namely, that the Palestinian side was to blame for initiating the violence and that it was trying to coerce Israel and advance its goals by means of force. Indeed, balance of power was evident in the situation on the ground: Israeli military forces were taking measures to coerce not only the Palestinian leadership but also the entire Palestinian population.

44. He quoted excerpts from an article, entitled "Lies accompanied by bullets", which had appeared in the major Israeli newspaper, *Ha'aretz*, the previous week, claiming that the official version of what was taking place, provided by the Israeli Defence Forces and the Israeli police, was always more readily available and given considerable prominence in the media, and always promoted the victim mentality. For example, the official version of an incident which had occurred on 6 October was that Israeli Defence Forces had acted with "self control and self restraint" in firing at Palestinians at the Netzarim outpost. According to the journalist, however, the army spokesmen had failed to mention the dozens of isolated shots and volleys of fire coming from the Jewish settlement of Netzarim, or that, from Netzarim's extremely sophisticated watchtowers, troops of the Israeli Defence Forces had fired high-speed, high-powered, live bullets at thousands of unarmed persons in an effort to deter them from approaching a well-fortified outpost and protesting the Israeli occupation. The account gave the erroneous impression of a confrontation between two almost equally matched armies.

45. On the following day, when residents of the Al-Arub refugee camp hurled rocks at Israeli soldiers, a fourteen-year-old boy, Ala Mahpouz, who had run over to see what was happening after hearing the screams of a young Palestinian beating victim, had been shot with a "rubber bullet" at close and deadly range. Refugee camp residents had witnessed the soldiers dancing and jumping up and down on the highway. In addition to those examples, the horrific killing of Rami Aldura in his father's lap further testified to the fact that the coercion was not emanating from the Palestinian side.

The meeting rose at noon.